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# AIR WAR COLLEGE

## RESEARCH REPORT

THE FRENCH RAPID ACTION FORCE  
A KEY ELEMENT IN EUROPEAN CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE

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MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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**THE FRENCH RAPID ACTION FORCE  
A KEY ELEMENT IN EUROPEAN CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE**

by

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**A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH  
REQUIREMENT**

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AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE : The integration of the French Rapid Action Force in the Alliance: a key element which could reduce the conventional imbalance in Europe.

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Remarks on some historical aspects of the French withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure introduce a description of a drift which appeared in French attitude from 1970 to the early 80s till the birth of the French <sup>Force d'Action Rapide</sup> "Rapid Action Force" (F.A.R.).

An assessment of conventional balance of forces in Europe follows to show that the potential impact of the F.A.R. is significant.

At last, after a description of the F.A.R. itself, the author evokes the political aspect of that force in Europe, and what it implies about French commitment in European defense.

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## I - INTRODUCTION

When the French Government announced in the spring of 1966 that it proposed to end the assignment to NATO of all French armed forces, to withdraw all French staff from the integrated military headquarters and to require those headquarters and all foreign units to move, it seemed at first sight that the effect on NATO's military position might be grave. The country with the largest land area in Western Europe and important NATO facilities on its soil was withdrawing from the military organization, leaving allied defense with little depth and with its Southern flank cut off from the Centre and the North. There was bitterness among France's partners at this unilateral action, taken without apparent concern for the needs of Western defense by a country itself sheltered geographically by its allies and secure under the protection of the American nuclear guarantee.

After that withdrawal, the Allies wondered what would be France's commitment in wartime. Was agreement on a wartime role likely? Though it seemed unthinkable that France could be neutral if a major attack on her allies were to take place, for France to tie herself down to this in advance does not seem in character with the actions she had taken and the reserve she had shown. For her to agree in advance to take part in any lesser operations which might be thought necessary by her allies seemed even less likely. Certainly, nothing that would entail automatic involvement in allied action would be acceptable: French forces had been withdrawn from integration to avoid this possibility.

General de Gaulle said in 1959 about France's integration in NATO :

"...I believe that the Alliance will be all the more vital and strong as great powers unite on the basis of cooperation in which each carries his own load, rather than on the basis of an integration in which peoples and governments find themselves more or less deprived of their roles and responsibilities in the domain of their own defense." (1)

Almost twenty years later, in September 1987, France and Germany are involved in the most important common exercise ever organized by French and German Armies on German territory: 55.000 German soldiers, and half of the new French "Force d'Action Rapide": 20.000 soldiers, simulate what could be the response to a Warsaw pact attack with conventional forces.

Even if the most recent declarations of the French Prime Minister or the Minister of Defense still have their roots in what General de Gaulle said twenty years ago. It is obvious that things are changing, not in France's position vis-a-vis NATO, but in the way France is ready now to integrate its conventional forces in the Alliance outside French territory.

So, the purpose of this paper is not to explain why General de Gaulle decided to withdraw France from the NATO integrated military structure. Even if some people have not yet understood, everything has been said about that. Neither is the purpose of this paper to explain the French nuclear strategy; too many things are classified in that area. I will try in the following pages to explain why the integration of French conventional forces in the Alliance could be a key element to reduce the "conventional imbalance"

in Europe, thanks to the new "French Rapid Action Force".

For that, we will see first a reminder of France's position in the Atlantic Alliance in order to remove still existing uncertainty in that field. Then, I will comment on conventional imbalance in Europe. Finally, before the conclusion, I will explain the mission of the new "Rapid Action Force" and how it can affect the conventional balance in Europe.

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## II - FRANCE and the Atlantic Alliance

The Atlantic Alliance continues to hold an important position in France's foreign policy. Faithful to its prior commitments, Paris will do everything it can to confirm to its allies, especially to the United States, that France is a trust-worthy and loyal friend.

The French Government is well aware that American deterrence is an essential factor in the balance of power. But it should be remembered that American deterrence is of course designed to protect the United States and the entire Western camp, and not just France herself.

Accordingly, France will continue to reject, within the Alliance, any engagement that might lead to automatic responses and to any return to the integrated military organization of NATO. In order to preserve the Government's freedom of action, and to safeguard French interests within the Alliance, our policy of cooperation will continue to rest on the following three principles :

- cooperation involving only our conventional forces and consequently excluding any plan for the use of nuclear arms.
- no automatic commitment of French forces. This specifically precludes France from sharing the peacetime responsibility for land, sea or air zones and from participating in what is called "the forward battle".
- in the eventuality that French forces become engaged alongside NATO forces, they will remain grouped under French command.

Furthermore, France considers the Atlantic Alliance to be more than a simple organization for collective security. She views

it above all as a human community in which she takes part and in which she pursues a policy that respects her own national identity.

That was the official position held by the French Government after France withdrew from NATO military structure. Since then, the French Government tried to initiate a serious review of the Alliance by its members in order to arrive at a better definition of the contractual obligations implied by the Alliance.

After withdrawal, France could still participate in a "forward battle" in West Germany, but only if this appeared to be in French interests and consistent with her interpretation of Alliance obligations. Conventional forces were essentially dedicated to serving the security of the national "sanctuary" in the event of a NATO defeat in the forward battle in West Germany.

I recognize that France's attitude might have seemed fairly ambiguous and, in 1966, I guess that the Allies thought like David Yost :

"Exactly when and how France might participate has been kept deliberately obscure for many reasons: domestic politics in France ; the conviction that unpredictability enhances deterrence ; and the desire to keep French options open in crises, that is, to preserve an option of nonbelligerency." (2)

Since then, how to use the French conventional forces has been a tricky question for French politicians. Since 1966, we can see, little by little, a drift in the French intent on using that force.

De Gaulle's intention was that the First Army's role be limited in view of the "constraints inherent in the concept of deterrence" which was "the only effective way of ensuring our territo-

rial integrity and our political independence". This was confirmed in his November 1968 directive that :

"The basic role of the air and land forces does not consist in joining a battle that they have no chance of winning in view of balance of forces, but of obliging the adversary to face the risks of our strategic nuclear response." (3)

In the early 70's, our politicians said that France's potential participation in the forward battle would, in any case, be subordinated to the requirements of French deterrence. France's conventional forces would remain in the area of her frontiers to the North and East. Moreover, France's participation would not take place in a flexible response framework, for that would be too costly in terms of conventional forces and be ineffective for deterrence and defense. In that area, there is no change today." France continues to stick to the purest form of nuclear strategy, namely, the threat of massive retaliation to deter any aggression on its soil, be it conventional or nuclear." (4)

Concerning France's obligation to undertake operations beyond her frontiers in order to warn the aggressor through deterrence not to attack our country, General Michel Fourquet said in 1969 :

"...the necessity for the Government to make the best of unforeseeable circumstances and, among others, the difficulties of an engagement through allied forces that might have been partially disorganized might lead to acting only a short or near distance from the frontiers while profiting as much as possible from the effort made by the allies in the forward area. To wait for the enemy on national territory is a risky operation and one that belongs in the framework of defense at all costs, foreseen for the case when deterrence would have failed, rather than that of a true deterrent maneuver." (5)

The 1976 statements by President Giscard d'Estaing and chief of staff of the Armed forces General Mery were particularly controversial in several areas.

General Mery's phrase "enlarged sanctuarization" was, for example, assumed to imply a clear step in the direction of offering a deterrent guarantee to France's allies. These statements implied that France had an interest in the continued credibility of that guarantee, at least for the security of her neighboring allies.

General Mery suggested that France's "independence of decision" would not "lead necessarily to autonomy in action", adding that participation in the "forward battle" could be essential for France's own security :

"...It would be extremely dangerous for our country to deliberately hold herself aloof from the first battle, in the course of which our own security would in fact already be at stake. This does not exclude the idea of a battle on the frontiers ; for we could be forced into this if the forward defense collapsed too quickly, or if our decision to intervene came too late, or if our movements were inherited by enemy actions... This lead us to envisage a second echelon participation in the first battle which could simultaneously assure an indirect cover of our national territory." (6)

To cite a 1972 "white paper", France must retain forces "able to carry out maneuvers consistent with her strategy of nuclear deterrence", and the capability of intervening in the forward battle must :

"...be kept within certain limits, both in volume and time, because it is important not to prematurely use the forces needed to defend the borders and their approaches." (7)

At that time, France was reproached by some of her allies

for preferring a second echelon role. The way they saw France's commitment was :

"while the first Army as a whole may be less likely to be committed to NATO's forward battle when it would be most needed, it is more likely to be committed if the forward battle seems likely to turn out well for NATO, because in that case, France would be less likely to require reserve forces for the implementation of deterrence. France would in all likelihood retain some forces to meet potential threats on other frontiers, to help maintain domestic order against infiltrated enemy forces or subversion, to protect key C3 sites and strategic nuclear forces, and to be able to implement her deterrence." (8)

In 1975, Prime Minister Jacques Chirac declared that "we cannot be content to sanctuarize our own territory and we must look beyond our frontiers." (9) This idea was followed in 1976 by the "sanctuarisation élargie" or "increased sanctuarization" controversy. This new idea implied that the French sanctuary did not begin along the French border but farther, at the West German one. That same year, President Giscard d'Estaing said that the concept of two zones in Europe, the battle zone and the territory of France, was not realistic, "...for this reason, there must be only one military system in this zone, since there will only be one zone." (10) In the event of conflict, it seems obvious that there would be only one zone because of the speed of transportation and communications, especially by air. From the outset, French national territory would be included in this generalized battle area.

The phrase about "only one military system" in a single war zone contained many insinuations and was interpreted to imply functional reintegration in NATO by many of the government's

critics, particularly among the Gaullists, Communists, and Socialists who preferred a France with independent options. Given the context of efforts to improve France's conventional forces, the political outcry became intense. The government was accused of subordinating France to NATO and compromising France's independence and security.

Since the late 1970's we have seen an increased rate of such remarks about France's readiness to respect and fulfill her Alliance commitments in the event of aggression in Europe ; remarks made most of the time by Prime Ministers, Ministers of Defense or the President himself. Those remarks brought out statements from American leaders. In view of the effectiveness of Franco-NATO cooperation in certain activities, General Rogers, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR) said in "Le Monde" March 25, 1981, that "our military cooperation over the past several years could not have been better" and has been equally excellent since the election of Mr Mitterand. In his own words, he has "always been convinced that, if NATO were attacked by the Warsaw Pact, the French would join the Allies in the defense of Western Europe." He added in the same article his conviction that France's armed forces would be placed, at that time, at the disposition of NATO command.

At last, in his 1981 and 1982 speeches to the Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale, the "IHEDN", Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy deliberately repeated that "aggression against France does not begin when an enemy penetrates the national territory." (11)

Even if he did not say exactly when or where it begins, in my opinion, he was referring to the eastern border of West Germany. Finally, very recently, the current Prime Minister, Jacques Chirac, in an address to the same "IHEDN", on December 12, 1987, said about the recent Franco-German maneuvers on German territory :

"...Who could doubt now, in the event of West Germany being attacked, that France would immediately react to that aggression ? One cannot have a battle of Germany and a battle of France." (12)

So, since the brutal withdrawal from the NATO military structure ordered by General de Gaulle in 1966, we have noticed, little by little, a drift, or let us say different interpretations in French politician's declarations. The present situation, especially the relations with West Germany, can be viewed as the logical result of that drift. If there is still, I would say, an "obvious, intentional unpredictability" as far as the use of French nuclear weapons is concerned (some people would say ambiguity) on the contrary, the will of using conventional forces alongside NATO armies is clear.

Nevertheless, David Yost pointed out in 1984 that :

"We can easily understand that France could participate in a certain way in the forward battle... But, following an affirmative decision in that area, France would face the question of how to participate, that is, how many troops to commit, whether to subordinate them to NATO Command, what mission to assign them, etc." (13)

My answer is: the 40,000 men of the "Rapid Action Force", anywhere, anytime in West Germany...

[illegible]



### III - CONVENTIONAL IMBALANCE IN EUROPE

"The Soviet Union is by no means invulnerable..." (14) said Dennis M. Gormley in 1985 about conventional forces in Europe. "Bean counting of static inventories, where the Soviets have an advantage, does not present an accurate picture of the military balance in Europe" said Joshua M. Epstein of the Brookings Institute in 1987. (15) "As a first step, the perceived imbalance of conventional forces between the Warsaw Pact and NATO must be carefully assessed." (16) said British Defense secretary George Younger in December 1987.

One must recognize that we usually hear the opposite opinion. So, where is the truth? Are there right and wrong ways to "count the beans"? Let us try to look at that issue more closely.

Since the Pershing 2 and cruise missile deployments in Europe, we don't hear about the "overwhelming" superiority of Soviet forces any longer. That presence of nuclear weapons reassured people and there was no use to disturb them. But last September, after the agreement between Mr Shultz and Mr Chevardnaze, discussions about conventional forces reappeared. Mr Caspar Weinberger himself, just before leaving his office for Mr Carlucci mentioned "the enormous superiority of Soviet conventional forces." (17)

Already during the "Cold War", more than 30 years ago, the Europeans were expecting to see the Soviet troops surging over their countries. We heard so many times that the Soviets were able

to invade Europe entirely in 48 hours. Let us be serious ! Since the purpose of this paper is not to make a precise military balance, we will not "count beans", nonetheless, to show we can have a different approach to the problem, let me take two examples : tanks and Soviet divisions.

When people want to show the Soviet conventional power, they mention very seldom the real capabilities of equipments or the true concepts of employment. On the contrary, they mention only the amazing numbers of tanks, divisions, etc.. They emphasize the 53,000 tanks, 32,000 of which are already in Europe, plus 14,000 of the Eastern countries. We must admit that these numbers are overwhelming ! And since Europe is far from having the same quantity, she is declared overtaken.

"In 1987, the outdated tanks (I mean the T54, T55, T62 and T64) still represented 81% of the Red Army's tanks." (18). As far as Eastern countries are concerned, they have very few T72 and not yet the T80. (19) The two modern tanks (8,500 T72 and 1,400 T80) are less numerous than their western equivalents, the German "Leopard" (6,600) and the American "M1" (4,800). (20)

As far as the Soviet divisions are concerned, the experts always mention three kinds of divisions, but they never give a detailed account in each category, except the first "Soviet Military Power", in the September 1981 issue.

The first category is the only one really operational in peacetime (roughly one quarter of totality). The second category (one quarter) requires one month to be ready, and at last, the third one requires two months. These two last categories require

the mobilization of 2,100,000 men to be ready. (21) It is difficult to find the exact number of divisions in each category but, from the "Soviet Military Power" of the Pentagon issued in 1981 and the annual British "Military Balance" we can conclude, with little margin of error, that there are approximately 57 divisions in the first category, 45 of which are in Europe. Even with the 33 divisions of the Warsaw Pact countries, the imbalance is not so overwhelming with the 84 NATO divisions ready in peacetime in Europe... without France.

So, as says every year the "Military Balance", to count equipment and combat units is difficult and complex. Even if the USSR always has a noticeable superiority, Joshua Epstein said that "only a pseudo-empiricist would suggest that numerical superiority is a determinant". NATO has chosen quality, he said. They have 2 1/2 times the command and control troops of the Warsaw Pact nations, two times the support troops, better allies and better training. Moreover, the Soviets are having problems maintaining their advanced weaponry as well as interoperability problems, since they share very little of their most sophisticated equipments with their allies. An advanced Soviet MIG landing at a field in Czechoslovakia, for example, could not be repaired, said J. Epstein. (22)

On the offensive side, the Soviets also would face a severe tactical disadvantage. Attacking prepared NATO positions, Warsaw Pact forces would have to outnumber the defenders by ratios of 3 to 1, perhaps as high as 5 to 1, to assure victory. Even at full mobilization, minus the troops held back for contingencies, the Warsaw Pact would outnumber NATO by a ratio of only 1.5 to 1, Epstein said. "That modest edge can't overcome the other advantages"

he said, and "NATO has the material wherewithal in supplies, munitions, training to stalemate the Warsaw Pact." (22)

As said Charles W. Corddry last December :

"...Conventional military forces in Western Europe are quite able to stop an attack by overrated Soviet formations without any need to resort to atomic weapons, according to a comprehensive study issued yesterday by a leading nuclear arms control advocacy organization." (23)

Timed for the upcoming summit, the study sought to demonstrate that "overwhelming superiority" on the part of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact was a "longstanding myth."

What strikes me in all the studies about military balance in Europe is that few assessments have explicitly asked what difference French participation could make. Only in 1977, James Blaker and Andrew Hamilton of the Congressional Budget Office made France a "key variable" in explaining differences in assumptions dividing optimistic and pessimistic views of the balance. (24)

The figures were concerned with the total regular army manpower they judged likely to be available for a conflict in Central Europe. They concluded that, with French participation, the ratios of NATO to pact ground forces at the central front can be reversed from about 1.2 to 1 in the Pact's favor to the same ratio in NATO's favor.

That conclusion reinforces my opinion that French conventional forces in the Alliance are of the utmost importance, especially with the "Rapid Action Force", the features of which we are going to see now.

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#### IV - THE F.A.R. or "FORCE D'ACTION RAPIDE" (RAPID ACTION FORCE)

##### A - Genesis of the F.A.R.

It is generally accepted that the inconsistency between a policy of alliance with countries threatened with aggression and a military strategy whose resolutely defensive attitude was symbolized by the Maginot Line, was at the heart of France's defeat in 1940. A similar contradiction can be established between the two aspects of our defense policy : membership in the Atlantic Alliance on one hand, and on the other hand, our nuclear deterrence that is designed to protect French vital interests which do not go far beyond the French national territory. This defense policy is generally accepted by the French people in spite of the ambiguity of the delimitation of our "vital interests".

During the second half of 1981, studies were pursued to find how France could affirm its solidarity more rapidly than with an armoured counterattack. Such a counterattack takes time and is difficult to implement especially when the specific area is unknown in advance. The problem was to reaffirm that solidarity without modifying in any way the current relationship between France and NATO. Furthermore, how could this be done while safeguarding France's freedom of action ?

One way of resolving this problem appeared in the utilization of technologies and tactics mastered in France, and their implementation by professional or active soldiers without a need for mobilization. Thus, in October 1981, it was proposed to the chief of staff "to regroup our combat helicopters in a brigade capable of rapidly

counterattacking enemy armoured breakthroughs far in advance of our currently planned deployment." (25) The idea of reorganization was therefore launched, and precipitated a two-fold research to determine its compatibility with our general defense policy and the effectiveness of this new concept. It quickly became apparent that, given our means, the level most adapted for a regroupment of our helicopter assets was that of a light division (less than 10,000 men) which is now known as the "Air-Mobile Division."

In order to study the validity of the formation structure, the combat command and support procedures, field exercises were undertaken in December 1982, September 1983 and September 1984. The first exercise explored the realm of problems posed by air mobile engagements. An air-mobile task force was tested while operating up to a radius of about 250 km, a distance which allowed the Army's light aviation to enjoy an autonomous combat potential in the zone after its deployment. The engagement of that force was then extended to a radius of 300 to 600 km. That extended operation posed problems especially for communications, logistics and Air Force support. The lessons drawn demonstrated the importance of reliable liaisons. The needs were evaluated with precision and the necessary means for satisfying these liaison requirements were defined. That first exercise also demonstrated that, at the envisaged distance of engagement, the force would benefit from a total logistic autonomy especially in ammunitions and fuel. Several logistical aspects were studied including initial operational radius, evaluation of consumption per day of combat, support of the engagement and pos

sible reinforcement. Lastly, the mobility of ground troops should be improved with the addition of light all-terrain and light transport crosscountry vehicles.

Undertaken in September 1983, the second exercise presented a synthesis of the experimentation in progress. The conclusions from those maneuvers were very positive. The second stage of this experiment was the deployment of an autonomous air mobile brigade, totally independent of the Army corps. The particular points studied within the framework of Central Europe concerned the liaisons with the French First Army and cooperation with the French Air Force, the "FATAC" (Tactical Air Force) and the "COTAM" (Military Air Transport Command) as well as with the Allies. Moreover, the respective roles of the different types of helicopter squadrons (anti-tank, fire support and protection, air lift) were envisaged in the perspective of a future equipment.

The September 1984 maneuver concluded experimentation and, as a result, the 4th D.A.M. (Division Aeromobile, or Air Mobile Division) was created on July 1, 1985, with headquarters at Nancy.

Continued interest in reorganizing a significant part of our helicopters in order to maximize their fire power and mobility indicated that the same type of reasoning could also be applied to certain tank units. France possesses in the "AMX 10 RC" a remarkable six-wheel armoured vehicle. Equipped with a 105 mm cannon, it provides good antitank capabilities, good all-terrain mobility, and above all, it is capable of covering a distance of 800 km without refueling en route. It quickly became very clear that a unit with

such equipment could represent the desired partner to complement the action of the Air Mobile Division. The 6th Light Armoured Division was created. It is capable of being engaged in the European theatre as well as in rapid assistance outside of Europe. Operational since November 1984, its headquarters are in Nîmes.

Studies were simultaneously undertaken on the role and composition of what were then called "the Intervention Forces". While the military situation in Europe could have seemed more or less frozen by deterrence, the situation in the Middle East and in Africa, where we are linked to a number of countries through defense agreements, became more and more unstable. Safeguarding peace necessitated making forces available which were capable of intervening quickly with maximum effectiveness.

Due to the increasing multiplicity of the division's responsibilities, its planning, training, logistic and operational implementation overworked the army staff. It therefore became clear that it was desirable to have an intermediate echelon to assume these tasks and the additional requirements to have the necessary means of command and control when deployed. That change in philosophy necessitated the establishment of a center of study capable of both rendering concepts more precisely and proposing desired material requirements for weapons, equipment, etc.

In June 1983, the French Parliament voted the "Loi de programmation militaire 1984-1988" and the President of the Republic approved the reorganization of the Armed Forces into 15 divisions distributed among 3 Army Corps and a "Force d'Action Rapide" consisting of 5 divisions.





personnel, the diversity of its components and its antitank firepower, this new component of the French Armed Forces represents a flexible and detachable ensemble whose elements can be engaged in accordance with their characteristics and the evolution of the situation.

Thus, this new force appears to be the optimal tool to prepare for the unforeseen. Its capability to react in case of crisis increases the Government's freedom of action. That potential is explained by General Fricaud-Chagnaud as follows : (26)

\* Participate in the management of crisis by signaling to a possible aggressor through its rapid deployment of significant elements that no aggravation of the situation will leave France indifferent, even in settling a localized incident. This possibility could be exercised outside of Europe and has already been demonstrated in Kolvezi, Lebanon and Chad.

\* Intervene independently or in conjunction with the First French Army on the side of our Allies in Europe without delay if the decision is taken by the President of the Republic. While the F.A.R.'s infantry divisions are capable of holding forestry or urban zones, this form of action falls more in the domain of the 4th Air Mobile Division and the 6th Light Armoured Division.

\* Provide the African countries with whom we are linked through defense agreements with more effective and rapid military assistance than in the past. This is due to increased antitank capabilities and the existence of modular command elements able to work effectively with the Air Force and Navy whose support is indispensable for the success of such operations. It should be noticed

that with the launch of a French telecommunications satellite five years ago, command and control of our deployed forces is much easier.

So we have seen that the genesis of the F.A.R. comes from the will to have forces available to intervene quickly with maximum effectiveness. We have seen its capabilities with its 47,000 men. Let us now see a key issue, its significance.

#### C - SIGNIFICANCE of the F.A.R.

To question France's objectives in pursuing this reorganization of her forces is a normal reaction. Its necessity was initially denied since all the components already existed and it could be regrouped if such a need appeared. The lessons of history however strongly contradicted this opinion. To be effective, a force should be organized in advance, be trained and possess a previously established employment doctrine. Besides, it has taken almost two years for the Army's light aviation to adapt from a combat function for the benefit of the divisions or an Army Corps to an autonomous use far in advance of our forces.

One can be surprised by seeing a single ensemble entrusted with two series of missions in Europe and in theatres outside of Europe against diverse potential adversaries. It must be remembered that the mission of the F.A.R. is not necessarily to be engaged in a bloc and it is precisely the diversity of its means that permits it to operate in the most judicious manner. Such a duality is not new in our history and it was always that way for our Marine units as well as for those of other great countries. It remains the same today. Limited financial and human resources do not permit

us to train forces awaiting to perform improbable missions.

Many other reproaches have been formulated both in France and among our Allies. I could summarize them through the following question: by this reorganization, does France seek to disengage herself from some of its contractual obligations in Germany to better assure its deterrence at the limits of its borders or, on the contrary, does this reform imply a more or less camouflaged return into the integrated military command of NATO ?

The second reproach was, as you can imagine, formulated in France, particularly by the Communists, governing at the time in coalition with the Socialists. They pointed out that the F.A.R. could raise a risk of automaticity in French commitment due to a possible need of Allied logistic support. I think we have seen clearly in the previous pages that the existence of the F.A.R. does not bring any change in the technical nature of the relations already existing between France and the NATO military command. In fact, without changing her defense policy, France has equipped herself with new means available to the political decision maker to modulate his action and eventually realize more quickly the translation of political decision into much more efficient actions. These actions become a matter of hours instead of days.

Moreover, the F.A.R. is "technically neutral". It does not affect that "hard shell" of French deterrence strategy. Nonetheless I don't see it strategically neutral on the European level since it increases the possible modes of French intervention. The "tool", therefore, does not have "color". In my opinion, only according to

what French leaders choose to do with it, will it acquire one. The announcement of this new capability does not preclude retaining the attention of our allies as well as of our potential adversaries.

Equipping oneself with the means to affirm one's presence or to rapidly intervene cannot help but comfort allies who are always uneasy about their security. There cannot be a clearer sign for our allies, and that answers the first reproach formulated above.

Charles Hernu when he was Minister of Defense said in December 1982 :

"...France might choose to intervene at a time and place helpful to the security of the Allies by describing one of the F.A.R.'s missions as making available for commitment from the first manifestations of a crisis or conflict, a conventional expeditionary force able to insert itself in the Allied deployment in Europe in any zone where a need would be felt." (27)

Jacques Huygues des Etages, a prominent Socialist defense expert described the F.A.R.'s missions in terms suggesting a virtually unprecedented degree of French commitment :

"...The Rapid Action Force aims at the projection, as far and as fast as possible in Europe, of significant forces from the start of a crisis. With the F.A.R., one cannot defend a strategic direction like an army corps, but one can plug a hole, strike a blow and show that we can integrate ourselves in the Alliance." (28)

And finally, even as he stressed the traditional French refusal to accept in peacetime any responsibility for a specific mission in West Germany, General Rene Imbot, Army Chief of Staff in 1983, referred to the possibility of some F.A.R. elements being used not only as crisis management symbols of French commitment in order to restore deterrence and stability, but also as combat

forces engaging a Soviet Operational Maneuver Group as large as one or two divisions far forward in West Germany. (29)

So, it seems to me that the F.A.R. is not only that projection force of 47,000 men with their helicopters, armoured vehicles and antitank weapons associated, but also and above all, a political factor which represents a watershed in French planning for conventional commitments in Central Europe. The actual force improvements in the F.A.R. are not so important, but one must recognize that the statements made since the birth of that force imply a shift in French attitude vis-a-vis European defense. That shift could presage more fundamental changes.

Some implications stand out :

- a stronger public commitment than has ever been made since 1966 regarding participation in the forward battle.
- closer coordination with Allies in West Germany, proved very recently by the creation of a French-German brigade.

These changes are important because they could provide the domestic preconditions for other constructive changes in policy. In comparison to previous French policies of rigid "sanctuarization", with a sharp distinction drawn between the forward battle and the national deterrent maneuver, these emerging attitudes should be welcomed by the Allies. Even though French conventional capabilities will not improve substantially, the evolution in attitude points toward more political emphasis on committing more forces at an early point in a forward position in a conventional contingency.

Allied commanders seem to welcome the establishment of the F.A.R. as a force that could have political, psychological and operational impact beyond its limited size. West German chancellor Helmut Kohl, in a keynote speech to Parliament, said : "...closer French-German military and financial ties serve the interests of Europe and the NATO defense alliance", "...the close security and defense cooperation between France and West Germany strengthens the European pillar in NATO". (30) And when some NATO leaders, notably British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, said that a French-German brigade and a joint defense council to be established this year would weaken the Alliance, Mr Kohl, directly addressing this criticism said : "Our cooperation is not directed against anyone. No one is excluded from it." (31)

At last, I would like to finish with some words about an unknown factor which irritates the Allies but which could be that "fog of war" of Clausewitz for the Soviets in case of conflict in Europe. Since the French refuse to be bound to any automatic pre-commitment to participate in a conflict, planning and interoperability uncertainties exist for the Alliance. France has always argued that her posture creates much more uncertainty for the Warsaw Pact. That is true especially when it is a matter of 47,000 men with all their antitank capabilities, able to respond quickly at the East German border. In other words, the main value of the potential French contribution may reside not so much in the numerical volume of the forces that might be committed, but in the unpredictability of their engagement in terms of timing and location.





## V - CONCLUSION

In the previous pages, I have tried to show that since France withdrew from NATO's military structure, a withdrawal often interpreted as a refusal to commit herself in a forward battle in Europe, French attitude has changed little by little. I would say that the birth of the Rapid Action Force is a logical consequence of that drift in attitudes and declarations. A force of 47,000 men with its associated antitank equipment can be very important in the balance of conventional forces in Europe, especially if we assess carefully the Warsaw Pact forces capabilities.

The present French military forces can no longer be characterized as an outdated force with a Maginot Line mentality. As David Yost says : "...French elites have become more acutely aware of how profoundly France's security depends on that of the Federal Republic of Germany." (32)

Through ever increasing defense cooperation with the Federal Republic of Germany, France has obviously demonstrated that her "vital interests" extend well beyond the Rhine and that she is ready to assume her fair share of the common defense burden in Central Europe. As remarked by Philip Karber :

"...Potentially, the most significant improvement in NATO's generation of additional forces is the new French operational priority in the design and development of their Rapid Action Force. While small in size and relatively light by Central Region standards, the F.A.R. symbolizes French intentions in joining NATO's defenses within the first hours of a campaign. What gives this air-mobile force such potential is what is behind it." (33)



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